

FIRST PLACE
Junior High Division (West Junior High School)

The Superheroes of Our Lives
Nomin-Erdene Jagdagdorj

The man looked at the tens of thousands of names on the wall. With mixed feelings, he ran his fingers over the names. Feeling glad that his name was not included, but sorrowful because of all the names that were, he ran his fingers over the names one last time before moving on. The man knew that he would eventually have to recall all of the memories, but he chose to block them away once more. Instead, he continued on walking around and reading more names on the monument. The man recognized a name here and there. He knew that these people had died for their country, and he honored them.

The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall was built "to acknowledge and recognize the service and sacrifice of all who served in Vietnam." This memorial is just one of many memorials that have been built to remember and to honor the people who were willing to fight for their country. Sleeping in our warm beds, eating our fresh-cooked meals, or sitting in our comfortable cars, we will probably never know the reality of war. We will never be able to relate to the memories that veterans may share with us, but we can try to understand what they have been through.

Veterans are some of the heroes in our lives, although we may not realize it. Although they lack the powers such as flying or invisibility like the superheroes we know, veterans still "save the day." They don't have spider-webs coming out of their wrists, and they don't wear masks or capes, but they do protect us. Veterans fight for places they may have never seen, for causes they may have never believed in, and for people they

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have never known. With selflessness and graciousness, veterans jeopardize their own lives for the lives of others.

As they were in the past and as they will be in the future, veterans are heroes. Veterans know to be thankful for the things that we complain about. They are the ones who truly know that the freedoms and rights and liberties that citizens have should not be taken for granted. Veterans are those who fought for, defended, and worked for the way of life we have now. After all of the danger, hardships, and sacrifices that veterans have experienced, we honor all those who have lost their lives and all those who have survived: all fighting under the risk of death and the hope of the future.

SECOND PLACE
Junior High Division (West Junior High School)

Annemarie Van Doren

A Hero in our Midst

They have protected our nation in our times of uncertainty. They have sacrificed their youth for ours. Scars from their physical struggles display the signs of their courage, but the scars underneath—the unseen proof of victory over human nature—show their love. They stand; a line of solidarity in this eclectic world. Their bodies might be worn from their exertion, but through their veins the red blood of American pride runs strong. Their dedication to the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all has lead them to sacrifice their unalienable rights to guard ours.

For many, youth has come to mean a time when young people spend searching far and wide for their identity. But they have already found it in their country. They have experienced the pride of being part of the American dream; the knowledge of the vast horizon afforded by this country. They have chosen to broaden that horizon of opportunity; they have given back so that more people will fulfill their dreams. They have experienced things far worse than anyone can imagine and yet they still stand strong.

Their resolve and their love for this country has become a part of them like a tributary running into the ocean; the waters cannot be separated. It cannot be controlled. The American Veteran has experienced so much. They know what sacrifice is. And they know what fear is. Yet the lives of our Veterans show that that they know that bravery isn't the lack of fear; it's carrying on in spite of it. An American Veteran is truly a hero in our midst.

THIRD PLACE
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The Common Heroes

James Dolezal

You're running to your station and see the many men dead as you speed by, you try desperately not to think about them. For now the battlefield is silent. For now. Suddenly you hear an explosion and shouts of agony as men begin to die. The fighting has begun again. The gun shots grow closer and closer to you as you run. You now see the battle, the enemy advances while your forces are rapidly going back. You see men fall with blood pouring from their chest. A man of the opposing force spots you. You have no time to react, as if in slow motion you see the man lift his gun. You see the muzzle and the darkness within, and then he fires.

The veterans join the armed forces knowing they might die. These men and women live through hell, except of course for those who don't return. People who know they are putting their life on the line for the sake of there country. These people are the veterans.

It takes a very strong person to go to war. Seeing your friends die, never knowing if you're safe. Veterans know this and they still decide to join the armed forces. It takes an amazing amount of dedication to your country to do this. These outstanding people know what they risk, and they are prepared both mentally and physically for the challenge.

The men and women in the military are some of the best. To keep the common people, to keep us, safe they go and fight. This people know that, which is why they fight. Many people help the common citizens, firefighters, cops, etcetera, but none risk

as much as the people in the armed forces. These brave men and women risk everything, even respect. There have been times when soldiers have been spat on when they returned from war. These people risk their lives and yet some still shun them. There is no good explanation for that. The veterans are brave and strong and deserve to get praise!

Veterans are really quite special. They know what is to be sacrificed, and they still do it to keep us safe. To keep us the U.S.A.! This is indeed heroism and of the greatest kind. There are people out there now fighting, and some citizens don't even think about it. There are no people like those who serve to keep us and our country safe. The veterans.

HONORABLE MENTION
Junior High Division (West Junior High School)

Proud To Be An American

By: Makenzie Skrabal

One stormy night, a man named Doug Simms left his home and was headed for Vietnam. He had no idea where he was going or what he was going to do. All he knew was that he had been drafted to serve and defend his country in the Vietnam War. Doug was a young man leaving his life behind, and as he turned to walk out the door he could hear his wife sobbing, and his two children wondering why their daddy was leaving. But, Doug knew what he had to do and he *had* to defend his country.

Men like Doug really mean a lot to me, because I know they could've stayed at home and ignored what was really going on in the world at that time. I know some men could've gone about their days forgetting that other countries needed the defense of the United States. I am very thankful for men like Doug who stand up for what is right and have the courage and honor to be proud to be an American. I am thankful people like Doug are brave enough to fight for our country, even if they are leaving their lives behind.

I have been told many stories about how it really was in the army, because my father served in the Vietnam War. He still has haunting night mares about those dreaded days he was out on the battle field fighting for his life or those haunting nights laying in bed and hearing planes and guns shots all around him. The one thing my dad missed most was his family. He was very lonely and scared in the jungle, and I am sure that is how every veteran whoever served felt from time to time. The worst thing that happened in my father's case was when he did finally get back from war, and he was happy to be

Proud To Be An American By: Makenzie Skrabal

home, people were cruel and not very kind to him and others like him. Even through all his troubles and hard times of re-adjusting to life, my father still believes that what he did was the right thing and he is very proud to be a veteran. In fact, he often says, "freedom is not free!"

Being a Veteran is a huge honor and I know every Veteran's Day, we thank those men and women who risked their lives for our freedom and stood up for what America truly believes in. I know every veteran has pride in their hearts that they were one of those few people who actually did risk their lives for all Americans. Being a veteran means that you were extremely courageous and very brave to risk your life for others. But most importantly being a veteran means you are proud to be an American and proud to stand up for what you believe in. That is why being a veteran is a huge honor.

FIRST PLACE
High School Division (Rock Bridge High School)

Alan Hatfield (Pg.1)

Our Nobler Selves

It is a cool June day and from a rocky cliff a man silently contemplates the blood-strewn beaches before him. Charred, twisted metal that once took the shape of boats and planes, now takes the shape of war, dripping silent unheard cries of desolation. However, the man does not merely see the utter destruction lying before him, but sees a crisply flying American flag behind the sight of horror. In it he can see sacrifice and bravery, desperation and courage. In it he can see the lives lost, the lives won, the pieces of liberty that every man past has cast at the feet of the world. It is 1944 in Normandy, France, and underneath this visage of terror, the man cannot help but see it shining through like a beacon: the legacy of the American veteran. In the darkest hours, the American Veteran is a torch, lighting the face of humanity and showing the world its nobler self.

In every time of injustice; in every time of need; when injustice pervades and destroys the fabric of humanity in some part of the world, the American Veteran is there, bringing out the worlds' best qualities which are left so vulnerable in tyranny's wake. Thus, veterans are not merely men and women sacrificing their lives, hopes, ambitions, dreams, and sentiments to preserve a better world, but are an ideal. The ideal that in our common humanity we find a relationship that ties us together in the universal cause of bettering our world. People from every race, color, creed, religion, personality, we find solace in veterans, as they protect our very livelihoods and leave us with the hope that the world can be repaired. The hope that everyone can be loved and everyone given the freedom and opportunity that we all need and deserve as human beings in this world. It is because veterans willingly carry the burden of the world on their shoulders and wave the banner of humanity in the face of the uncertain future that they

Our Nobler Selves

represent those intangible ideas that we fight so hard to attain on a daily basis. The spirit of justice flows through their being and entangles the human race together in its struggle for harmony. Thus, veterans become the most powerful weapon we have in the struggle against ourselves and triumph over our faults and insecurities as the defenders of our nobler selves.

In the uncertainty of the world and its terrors, veterans glisten as the noblest parts of humanity. Through their relentless dedication to those ideals of peace and justice, they not only fight for the people around them, but the people before them and every person to succeed them. In essence, veterans represent more to us than we can truly comprehend, but in their honor and the honor of a humanity in need, they deserve the utmost of our thanks, our service, and our devotion. So, the next time that you hear of war or of our success in overcoming adversity, know that those values that we cherish today were once in the hands of our veterans, whose sacrifices caused them to endure for our generation and those to come.

SECOND PLACE
High School Division (Rock Bridge High School)

Laura E. Matera

“Youth and Experience”

Ours has been a privileged generation in that we have not known the horrors of war on American soil. We have not known death personally nor have we been moved to action by an eminent threat. But while our understanding of war will never be complete, every American can at least appreciate the ideals that have been fought for. Every American can appreciate the triumphs of war, which have allowed the continued preservation of the United States of America. Thus, veneration and esteem are owed to American veterans who not only risked all they possessed for America, but invested all they hoped for in America.

Things once fought for endure even after violence has ended. War, brutal and costly as it is, has secured for our nation a lasting peace and prosperity. The ends justify the means, or so it would seem in war. But all that has been sacrificed in honor of democracy, freedom, and happiness cannot be forgotten. To forget that which was given in exchange for what we have would be blatant ingratitude. And to think of all that our veterans have seen, have experience, have suffered gladly, to maintain the American identity, to protect our families, our fortunes, and our way of life. World War I, World War II, Vietnam, and the Gulf War were not simply violent power plays, political intrigues, or wars of gain, as in medieval times, but wars of ideals—the defense of democracy in our relatively young nation is always a worthy cause, and those who defend it are always worthy citizens.

And while youth and idealism and age and experience continue to clash, we cannot forget that this struggle is necessary to internal unity. Those who were once idealists are now experienced and those who are now idealists will eventually be experienced. Veterans are people and like all people, they know the zeal of youth and will or do know the comfort of experience. But they are special in that they have had to know both at once. Young men had to grow up fast—no more soda fountains, drive-ins, or frivolity: they were needed. Perhaps the greatest sacrifice in war was in giving up the more carefree side of life, which would indeed be difficult for the youth of today. But perhaps, we are not so profligate and weak as we seem, perhaps the sense of entitlement we know now is because we have come to depend on the freedoms veterans have won. If the occasion was presented, let us hope that we may rise fully to it as did our honored veterans. Let us be courageous and worthy in danger.

Veterans deserve our respect, our love, and appreciation. They symbolize the struggles of the past, the fears of the future, and the hope in our nation. Without those who are willing to sacrifice everything, there will be nothing worth sacrifice. And so it is that youth and idealism meets age and experience—let them be friends.

THIRD PLACE
High School Division (Hickman High School)

Chrissy McAdoo

Real Life Superheroes

When I was a child, if someone would have asked me to describe a hero, I would plunge into a deep and well thought-out description of every childhood superhero I could think of. "They would run super fast," I would explain, thinking of The Flash, "and be really intelligent," remembering my personal favorite, Batman. I would think a little harder and quickly retort that the hero would not have any weakness, remembering how disappointed I was to find that Superman had one major flaw, his weakness to Kryptonite. Now that I have grown a little older, and realize real life isn't like my Saturday morning cartoons, my definition of a hero has changed quite a bit.

Of course, when the word "hero" is brought up, many key public figures pop into one's mind. Firefighters. Police Officers. Even parents and grandparents. Another figure I immediately think of is Veterans. Veterans are very much like the superheroes of my childhood, maybe not because they can pick up a car or because they can shoot laser beams from their eyes, but for other, sometimes more admirable qualities. Courage and integrity are only a small number of the many qualities each of these individuals possess.

I hear on the news occasionally of stray soldiers that enjoy shooting innocent people and abusing those who have nothing to do with the task at hand, but that is exactly what they are, atypical. Real heroes are the ones who bear a phenomenal amount of integrity, to morally know and do what is right, no matter the consequences.

Like my childhood heroes, Veterans not only have the courage to go to war to protect me and my fellow countrymen, but they also have the courage to know the difference between right and wrong, and possess the ability to act on what is right. My

Real Life Superheroes

grandfather tells me when he went to fight in World War Two, when he was a young man -- not much older than myself, but already with much more courage than I could ever muster. He told me of the good times he had, bonding with all of his friends, but he also told me of the harder times, like dragging his friend to safety when he was shot by the enemy. Listening to the story, I think to myself, this man is a real hero, much more so than animations with super-human powers.

Veterans may not be amazing fictional heroes who have superpowers such as invisibility or superhuman strength, but they are amazing real life heroes that deserve just as much praise as any cartoon.

HONORABLE MENTION
High School Division (Rock Bridge High School)

Veterans Essay
Kristen Blair

Rock Bridge High School

Veterans are very special people; they have contributed so much to our community. They have served in a war and helped deliver our people to where we are today; they have helped preserve our freedoms, and unity as a country. Veterans are important people even in society today; they help remind the people of the lives given protecting our country and our rights. They help people to have patriotism, to help love our country even with all the flaws that are in it, our country is still one to be proud of and if you ask and veteran they would talk for hours as to why this is true. Veterans have contributed so much to society and we will always be in their debt.

In war, there are no unwounded soldiers. ~José Narosky. Veterans are the soldiers that made it out alive, but they will be scarred forever for the things they have seen, done and experienced. Veterans are passionate, and although they will get emotional they will always tell there story. Every veteran has a different story and a different lesson to learn. Their stories are passionate, and full of emotion, telling the unveiled details of the darkness of war. They always believe what they are fighting for, but they usually doubt they way they fought for it. Veterans are very important people to our society; people to listen to and learn from. They walk our streets like regular people, and some, on the outside look like regular people, but inside they are all torn and scarred, hurting with memories that they cant release, and dreams they cant escape from.